

‘A Vision in Green’: An analysis of the relationship between environmental protection and Gross National Happiness in Bhutan

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Bhutan has paved the way for Human-Environment-Centric policies that contribute to Gross National Happiness (GNH). According to GNH Centre Bhutan (2025), the quality of development is measured by balancing material and spiritual growth. The purpose of this study is to assess the connection between environmental protection and GNH in Bhutan. Thereby, the research objective is to examine the contribution of environmental protection to GNH. Consequently, the research question is, how does environmental protection contribute to GNH? The study relied on qualitative secondary sources as well as the Human Needs Theory by Abraham Maslow, where he suggests different layers of needs that are interconnected and should be fulfilled for a person to reach fulfilment in life. Chung (1969) mentions these needs as physiological, safety, social, self-respect, and self-actualisation. Additionally, Human Development, Human Security, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development have also been included. The results showcase that the Bhutanese rely heavily on the environment and their basic needs, which include physiological needs such as food, water, and clean air, and safety needs such as security of employment, family, and availability of resources can only be obtained by conserving the environment. This eventually connects with their other needs such as belongingness and love needs and esteem needs which are focused on mutual relationships and connections. Subsequently, they can achieve freedom from want, fear, and indignity and eventually boosting stability, and a sense of accomplishment and are able to have the life they desire. This research also noted how environmental security can affect other aspects of Human Security and ultimately Human Development. In conclusion, this research suggests that enhancing this connection and molding it into development policies can be one of the solutions for climate change, and also mental well-being.

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